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ABSTRACT

The model school-to-work system creates a foundation in the early grades and continues to build until students complete their studies. In the elementary grades, the major components of students' school-to-work education are career awareness and developing basic skills. Developing career awareness includes creating an environment where students see connections between school and the real world. Skills building incorporates not only the basic academic skills but also thinking skills and personal qualities that will be applicable for success in the workplace. Teachers can help students make the connection between academic skills and their future by ensuring that lessons have some relation to the real world. Elementary school can also be the appropriate time to introduce students to jobs that may not be traditional for their gender, race, or ethnicity. Some schools establish schoolwide programs/classrooms modeling the "real world." It is important that elementary school subjects include the instruction required for students to develop the basic skills, thinking skills, and personal qualities needed for solid job performance. Norland Elementary in Dade County, Florida, and Thoreau Elementary in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, have effective school-to-work programs. Contains 10 references and an annotated list of 6 resource organizations to contact for further assistance. (MN)

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SCHOOL TO WORK OPPORTUNITIES

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★RESOURCE BULLETIN

JANUARY 1997

# School-to-Work in Elementary Schools

In today's society, it is important to help youth find ways to make the transition from school to work. Therefore, it is essential that innovative programs be developed to introduce young people to the world of work and to help students to see a connection between what they are learning in school and what is important in the real world. Efforts to accomplish this must start early in the child's education, and cannot wait until high school. By then, many youngsters have made decisions to bypass more rigorous academic course options, or worse, have mentally "checked out" and disregarded the relevance or importance of learning in the classroom.

The School-to-Work Opportunities Act of 1994 offers a chance to prepare young people for a productive life of continuous learning and successful careers. School-to-work brings together partnerships of employers, educators, parents, and others to integrate academics and preparations for the workplace throughout the child's education. School-to-work systems aim to be comprehensive, exposing students to school- and work-based learning, from kindergarten through college graduation.

The model school-to-work system creates a foundation in the early grades and continues to build until the student completes his or her studies. In the elementary grades, career awareness and developing basic skills are the major components of the student's school-to-work education. Career awareness activities are designed to make students aware of the broad range of careers and/or occupations in the world of work, including options that may not be traditional for their gender, race, or ethnicity. Career awareness activities range from limited exposure to the world of work through occasional field trips and classroom speakers, to comprehensive exposure, which may involve curriculum redesign and introduction of students to a wide span of career options.

The middle school grades continue to build on the foundation established in the elementary schools, utilizing career exploration as the primary focus of school-to-work. Career exploration should provide in-depth exposure to career options for students. Activities may include the study of career opportunities in particular fields to identify potential careers, writing individual learning plans that dovetail with career majors offered at the high school level, or review of local labor market information. In high school, a student's school-to-work education focuses on direct exposure to career. Activities at the high school level that provide actual work experience, which is connected to classroom learning.

This resource bulletin focuses on the first stage of the school-to-work process: elementary schools. The bulletin presents key elements for school-to-work in elementary schools, outlines effective practices, and lists resource organizations for information on elementary level school-to-work.

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# Creating an Environment of Career Awareness

The primary focus of school-to-work in elementary schools is career awareness and building basic skills. Developing career awareness includes creating an environment where students see connections between school and the real world. Skills building incorporates not only the basic academic skills, but also thinking skills and personal qualities that will be applicable for success in the workplace.

It is important for elementary age children to be aware of the world of work and of how their school learning experience is connected to their future. Elementary schools can do a number of things to create this student awareness. Schools should assist students in seeing the connection between academic skills and their future life and career, to ensure that students are exposed to "real life" jobs, and help students to view themselves as part of the future job force.

**Building Connections for Students Between Academic Skills and the Future.** A key to helping students meet high academic standards is clarifying the relationship between what they are learning and the applicability to real-world situations. It should be noted, this is not a new idea and many teachers in schools throughout the country currently and in the past integrate curriculum to help students see this school to real world connection.

Teachers can help make the connection by ensuring that lessons have some relation to the real world. For example, when teaching a math concept, instead of using abstract examples, teachers can use real life problems. A teacher can take a class working on weights and measures in the classroom to the fruits and vegetables section of the local grocery store to see their learning being used. This not only makes learning more meaningful, but begins to introduce students to some of the skills that might be necessary for a productive life and successful career.

Another strategy is to build the entire curriculum around an industry theme. For example, using aviation as the theme, a teacher could construct a math lesson on distance and time, a social studies lesson on geography, a science lesson on aerodynamics, and an English lesson requiring students to write stories about the airport.

In addition, it may be beneficial to bring into the classroom community members with jobs that utilize the skills students are learning. Having someone explain and demonstrate how a particular concept the students are studying is used in real life is likely to leave a lasting impression on the importance of learning academic concepts.

**Introducing Students to "Real Life" Jobs.** Elementary school can be the appropriate time to introduce students to the world of work and the variety of jobs that may be available to them. The jobs introduced can include options that may not be traditional for the student's gender, race, or ethnicity. Bringing adults from the community into the classroom is beneficial for both the students and community members, giving students exposure to employment choices and providing community members a chance to interact and become more connected with the schools.

Some teachers assign themes to a particular grade level, so students are not visited by people from the same occupations each year. For example, the Junior Achievement Elementary School program assigns themes to school years such as "our city" for third grade, "our nation" for fifth grade, and "our world" for



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sixth grade. Community members with jobs that link to the particular theme come into the class and present a lesson connecting their job to the theme assigned to that grade. Other strategies for introducing students to careers include taking students to actual work sites to provide a first-hand look at careers, or using videos or printed materials to help students explore careers outside their community.

**Helping Students See Themselves As Part of Future Job Force.** Students can begin to understand that they will play a part in the workforce of the future, and choices they make in school will help prepare them to succeed. Some schools set up school-wide programs or classrooms that model the "real world." In the simulated settings, students may have a job to perform, for which he or she earns a paycheck. The paycheck might be used to purchase goods and services from other students or staff. A student who has a job as a banker learns the importance of obtaining math and other skills, which would be important for holding a banking job in the "real world" or skills that would help him or her as a consumer.

## Building Essential Skills

In addition to building career awareness, the elementary school years should be a time when students begin to develop essential work-readiness skills that would be required for any job. Students should acquire a conceptual foundation of skills that will allow them to obtain more specialized skills later on. For example, in early elementary school, students may learn to work and play well with others, to make decisions, and to act as a leader. These are fundamental skills that translate into any work situation. From the earliest grades, instruction in foundation skills should be integrated with the core subject areas.

**Skills to Build.** An example of the type of skills students need to obtain can be found in *What Work Requires of Schools*, written by the Secretary's Commission on Achieving Necessary Skills (SCANS). SCANS examined the demands of the workplace and whether young people are capable of meeting those demands. The Commission also advised the Secretary on the skills required to enter employment.

SCANS outlines five competencies and a three-part foundation of the skills and personal qualities needed for solid job performance. The foundation skills include **basic skills** of reading, writing, arithmetic and mathematics, speaking, and listening; **thinking skills,** including thinking creatively, making decisions, solving problems, seeing things in the mind's eye, knowing how to learn, and reasoning; and **personal qualities,** such as individual responsibility, self-esteem, sociability, self-management, and integrity. SCANS also outlines competencies a student should leave school with, such as the ability to productively use **resources**, **interpersonal skills**, **information**, **technology,** and **systems**.

**Integrating Skill Building Into the Curriculum.** The teaching of SCANS skills, mentioned above, can be built into the elementary school curriculum. Many teachers already successfully integrate the building of skills into the curriculum. For example, when teaching a reading lesson, some teachers require students to work in groups, which integrates social ability, problem-solving, and learning and reasoning skills into the lesson. Students are taught that skills such as working in groups are essential to success in the workplace.

## Effective Practices

Most successful school-to-work initiatives at the elementary school go beyond the traditional "Career Days" and work to link academics and future careers. Many elementary schools throughout the


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country carry out effective school-to-work initiatives. Following are two samples of programs that build both career awareness and skills.

The fourth grade at **Norland Elementary in Dade County, Florida** has taken a good look at the world of radio broadcast. In partnership with a group of three local radio stations, owned by Jefferson Pilot Communications, and with the help of a national program titled Kids and the Power of Work (KAPOW), the school and business have teamed up for a positive school-to-work learning experience.

Nine volunteers from the radio station staff, including the station manager, volunteered to be actively involved in the project. The radio station worked in conjunction with staff at KAPOW, who provided lesson plan goals and objectives for volunteers to cover in their partnership with the Norland Elementary fourth grade. The KAPOW lesson topics include career and occupational awareness, a worksite visit, positive work habits, self-awareness, interdependence, decision making, overcoming bias and stereotyping, and occupational structure. The radio station employees were able to take the lesson plans and incorporate their own experiences and ideas to share with the students. The station creatively incorporated these lessons by using videos, sample commercial, and other innovative projects to make these topics more interesting to the students.

The project fulfilled the goals of providing career awareness and building skills, while connecting the business community and schools. Through the program, students were able to learn more about all of the jobs involved in operating a radio station, and about topics that apply to any workplace, such as decision-making and overcoming bias and stereotyping.

**Thoreau Elementary in Milwaukee, Wisconsin** is part of the Milwaukee School District, which has actively integrated school-to-work students in kindergarten through high school. Henry David Thoreau Elementary School provides an example of bringing a "real world" perspective into the classroom. The school has created a mini-society with businesses, employees, and "Thoreau Bucks." In addition, the school has built some partnerships with businesses in the community that are helping bring the "real world" perspective into the school.

The school has created a number of businesses which "employ" students. Students must go to the Thoreau School Employment Agency to apply for jobs. Some of the businesses employing students include the School-to-Work General Store, the Plant Shop run by the second grade, the Popcorn Factory managed and run by the fourth and fifth grade, and Camp Thoreau, which is a partially student run camp-style program for kindergartners who attend school for half-days. In addition, some students work in the library, cafeteria, computer lab, headstart room, school newspaper, lunchtime game room, or assist the secretarial staff and work as tutors. Students are paid biweekly with their "Thoreau Bucks," which can be redeemed at the General Store and Camp Thoreau Novelty Store.

In addition, the school has set up a business partner, Associated Bank, which will be establishing a student-run bank. Other businesses have also helped by donating goods and educational supplies, providing speakers, tutors, and classroom assistants, and lending facilities for worksite visits.



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FOR MORE INFORMATION ABOUT THIS TOPIC, CONSULT THE FOLLOWING RESOURCES:

## Effective Practices

**Norland Elementary School:** John Casbarro, KAPOW Coordinator, 5532 S.W. 114th Avenue, Cooper City, FL 33330 ★ 954-434-6021 ★ August Silva, Vice-Principal of Norland Elementary School, 19340 87th N.W., Miami, FL 33169 ★ 305-652-6074.

**Thoreau Elementary School:** James Rainer, Thoreau Elementary School, 7878 North 60th Street, Milwaukee, WI 53223 ★ 414-354-3650.

## Organizations

**The Junior Achievement Elementary School Program** features sequentially integrated themes for kindergarten through 6th grade with business volunteers from the community presenting the learning activities which center around the theme assigned to the grade. Volunteers are trained by a local Junior Achievement staff member who has been trained at the National Headquarters in Colorado Springs, Colorado. Education Outreach, One Education Way, Colorado Springs, CO 80906 ★ 1-800-362-6479 ★ 719-540-8000.

**Kids and the Power of Work (KAPOW)** is a national network of business-elementary partnerships developed jointly by Grand Metropolitan, Inc. and the National Child Labor Committee to introduce elementary school students to the world of work through monthly lessons taught by business volunteers and hands-on worksite visits to the volunteers' companies. National Child Labor Committee, 1501 Broadway, Suite 1111, New York, NY 10036 ★ 212-840-1801.

**Learning Together** is a program sponsored jointly by the American Federation of Teachers, the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, the Chrysler Learning Connection, and Scholastic, which attempts to incorporate SCANS into grades K-3. The program provides guides for teachers and parents with activities to incorporate the skills into home and school activities. Scholastic, Ingrid Blinken, 555 Broadway, New York, NY 10012 ★ 212-505-4927.

**MicroSociety** emphasizes the use of authentic work settings in learning situations. Schools create a miniature society within the school. 53 North Mascher Street, Suite 3, Philadelphia, PA 19106-2224 ★ 215-922-4006.

**Scholastic International Publishing Group - Literacy Place** program advocates the use of mentors, who will be able to show and share their real life experiences with students. 2931 East McCarty Street, Jefferson City, MO 65101 ★ 1-800-325-6149.

**Walks of Life** is a school-to-work demonstration project in New York City that brings together schools, educational and support programs, and a broad spectrum of industries to improve academic and career preparation for students in New York public schools. This project works to bring together nationally- known programs such as KAPOW and Junior Achievement, and to ensure that school-to-work education is available at every grade level. 555 West 57th Street, New York, NY 10019 ★ 212-246-7100.

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